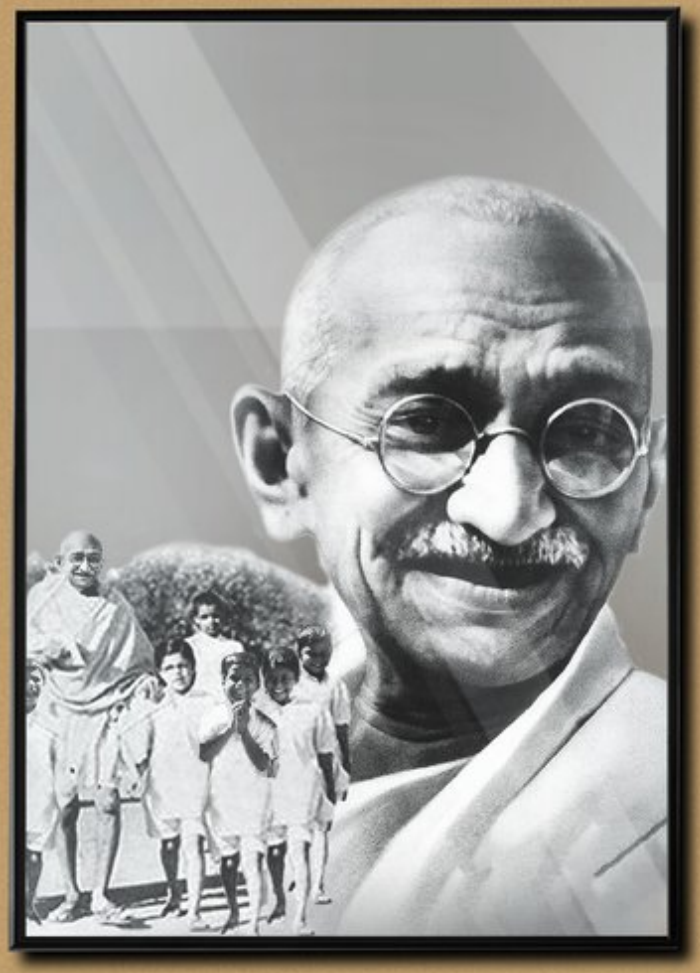


storyweaver Community

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Author: Mrinalini Sarabhai
Illustrator: Goutam Sen

Level 4

Dedication: To my granddaughter Anahita who read this book first and to every child who picks up this book to read and is prompted to work for peace.

Foreword:
Dear young readers of this book, including Anahita,

Gandhiji had four sons (no daughters, sadly) and fifteen grandchildren. I am one of his eight grandsons.
This is what I hear him saying: “I was a most fortunate person. So many wonderful people helped me. My story is the fruit of their friendship and love. Find out more about these remarkable helpers of mine.”
You who read this charming little book should try to find out more about the several Sarabhais, each of them special and unusual, who helped Gandhiji, including the industrialist Ambalal Sarabhai, whose daughter-in-law, the great dancer Mrinalini, is the author of this book. Youshould also try to know more about Ambalal’s wife Saraladevi, his sister Anasuya, and his daughter Mridula.
You will understand India better, and love India more, if you find out about these extraordinary individuals from the Western part of our country.
You should also try to learn more about these extraordinary individuals from the western part of our country.
You should also try to learn more about the graceful author of this book, Mrinalini, who came from the South and married the brilliant visionary son of Ambalal, Vikram. You should also discover what Mrinalini has done through her extraordinary talent by training thousands in dance.
May this marvellous book and its exciting story lead you to other exciting stories- and to a life of inner richness.

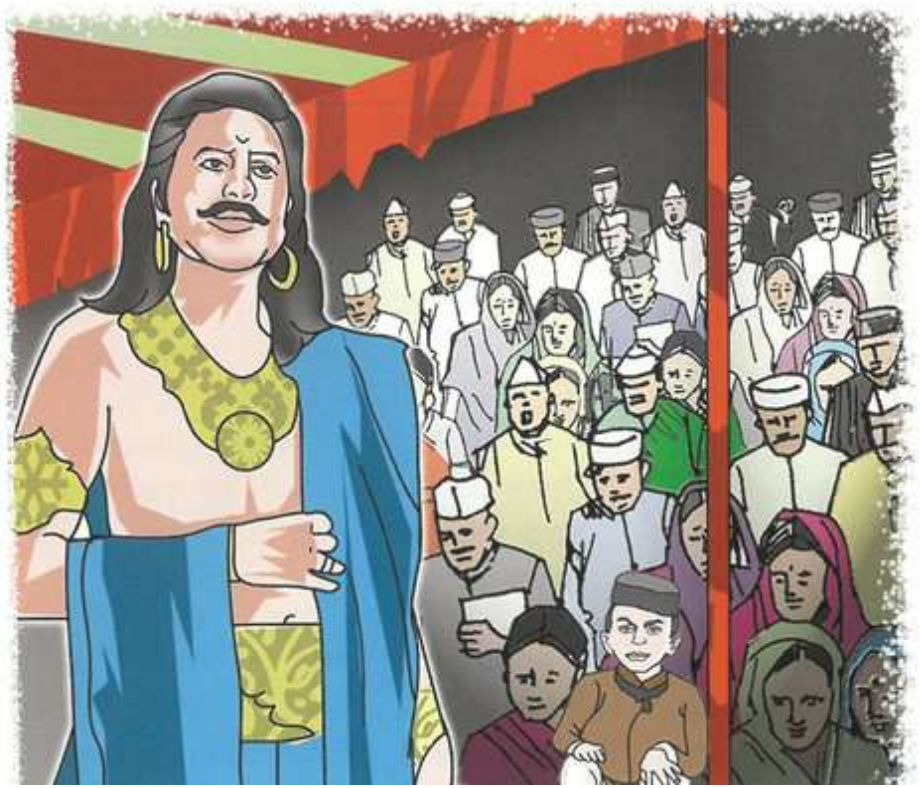
Wishing you every happiness,

-Rajmohan Gandhi

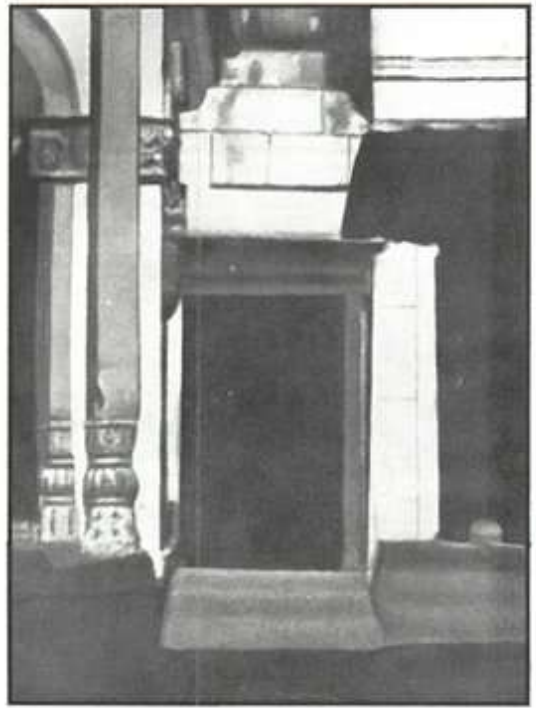
One day in a small town called Porbandar in Gujarat, there was excitement and joy, for that night the drama “Harishchandra” was to be staged. All day,the children talked of the play.

One little child was more excited than the rest. He had already seen pictures of the story. Now, a real drama group was going to present “Harishchandra” a play that captured his heart. What was the story that so moved him? Let me tell you.

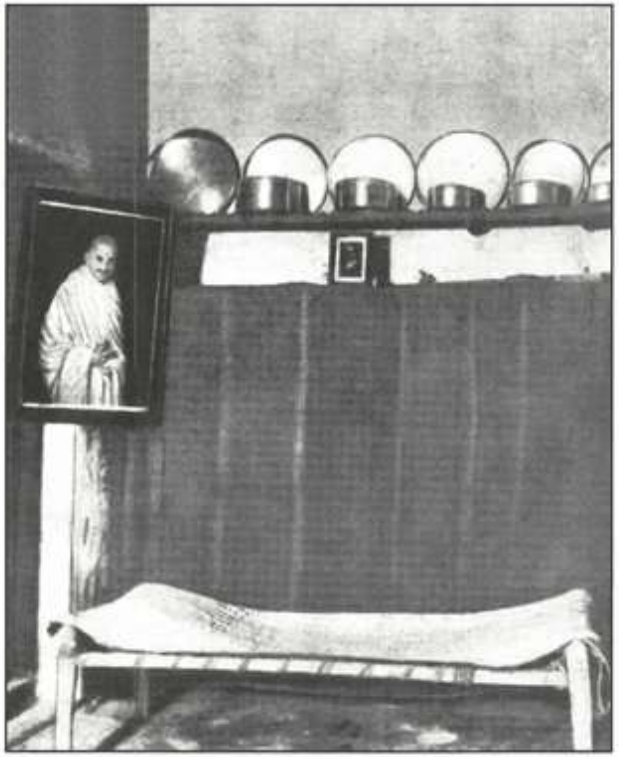
There was a great king called Harishchandra who ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya. He was a caring, good king and his finest quality was that he believed that truth was important and that no human being should ever tell a lie, even under the most difficult situations.



That night after he saw the play, so real in its presentation, the young child made a vow to himself, never to tell a lie. That became his creed in life.



In this light room of a house at Porbandar, Kathaiwad, Mahatma Gandhi was born on 2nd October, 1869.
Inset photo is the outer view of the house



Who was this boy? His name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a Gujarati Bania. His father was Karamchand Gandhi who became the prime minister of Porbandar, Rajkot and Vankaner. Though he was not educated, Kaba Gandhi as he was known, learnt from experience and managed to influence and guide many men by his practical understanding. But for the young Mohandas, his mother was the greatest influence.

Mahatma Gandhi as a pupil of the Rajkot Primary School, in the year 1877.

Mohandas was about seven when he went to school, a shy boy who hardly talked to anyone. Indeed, he usually ran back home after his lessons, but, though he was not very bright, he would never do anything dishonest. One day, when an inspector called Mr. Giles came to the school, he asked the children to write certain words. Mohan could not spell “Kettle” and his class teacher tried to make him copy it from another child, which Mohan refused to do. He never copied or cheated in class.

Mohandas was still in high school when he was married and did well and in spite of losing a whole year, he managed to win certificates and even scholarships. It was after his father’s death, that he joined a college in Bhavnagar but was not very satisfied with his studies.

Leading Satyagraha in South Africa in the year 1913

A friend told him that if he wanted to become a good barrister, he should study in England.

It was extremely hard for this young man to find the money for the passage to England.

In those days, there was one fear of crossing the seas, and another fear of losing casts. But when he was eighteen years old, Mohandas went abroad, in spite of protests from his community.

It was difficult for this young man to adjust to London, primarily to the food. There was hardly any vegetarian food available. “Everything was strange, the people, their way and even their dwellings”, he wrote later.

As a member of the Vegetarian Society, London, 1890.

> Fortunately he found a vegetarian restaurant in London, Not only did the food satisfy his hunger but he even found a book “A Plea for Vegetarianism” by a man called Henry Salt.

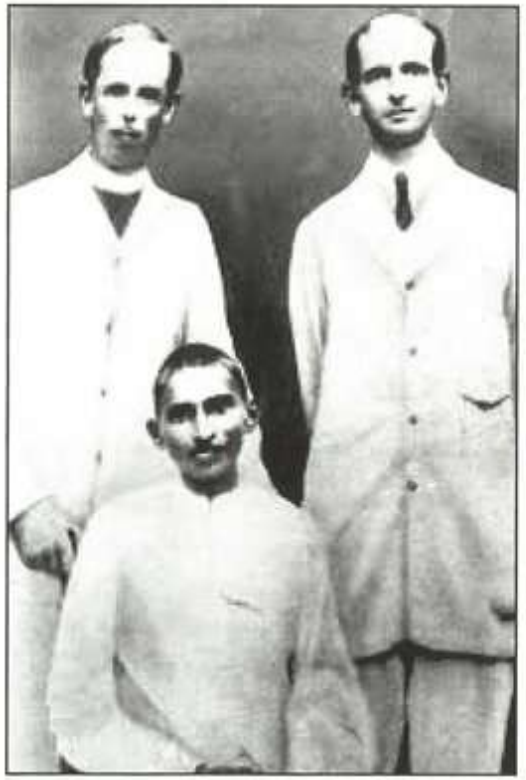
He had now found a new cause and began reading books onm diet and health which many years later he experimented on.

His homecoming in 1891 was a sad one, for his mother had just died. Now, a full fledged lawyer, he began his practice in Bombay at the High Court. It was a completely frustrating experience for this scrupulously honest young man. Even when he finally got a case, he became nervous and could not speak, finding himself completely tongue - tied. He never went to the court again and returned to Rajkot but even there he found no work.

In this desperate state, he felt helpless. There seemed no way out. Fortunately, he was saved by a Muslim firm which offered him a job in South Africa to instruct their counsel in a big lawsuit. It was for one year and the remuneration was good. Gandhi, who was feeling dejected gladly accepted the post. He set sail for Durban, South Africa in April 1893.

When Gandhi decided to go to South Africa, his intention was to make money for the family and repay debts of money borrowed when he went to England. But destiny had many surprises in store for him.

His client Abdulla Sheth received him at Durban.The young lawyer soon realized that the white people of South Africa were very different from the white people of England. They were a mixture of the Dutch and the British and treated all non - whites with contempt, calling them “coolies”.



With Rev. C.F.Andrews and Mr. Pearson in South Africa in the year 1911

Soon, the young Gandhi was to taste this poison for himself. Attending court, he was asked to remove his turban by the magistrate, which he refused to do. He even wrote to the newspapers of the insult, for which he earned the title of “unwelcome visitor”.

Here began the story of Gandhi’s fight for independence. Going for a lawsuit to Pretoria, which was the capital of South Africa’s Boers Republic, he boarded the train after purchasing a first class ticket. That evening, a white man entered the compartment and seeing a “coloured” (all non - whites were called coloured) he called the guard to evict him.

Gandhi refused, for he had bought a legitimate ticket. Without any courtesy, and with the use of brute force, he was thrown out of the compartment along with his luggage. Shivering in the cold of the night, miserable and unhappy, he became determined to fight for his rights. That night of darkness was to bring a new light to the entire world. This gentle, physically weak man was fearless in the face of racism and on that same journey bore the cowardly assault of other white man with courage and fortitude.

These humiliating incidents made Gandhi call a meeting of the Indian community when he arrived in Pretoria. For the first time he made a public speech without feeling nervous or tongue - tied.
He requested his compatriots to be truthful in their business, to be united, whatever their religion or caste, and to be clean and tidy in their habits. In that first public speech without faltering, Gandhi became a leader of the downtrodden, the citizens of the country, mean and women who were not “white”.

Perhaps in those moments of his speech in Pretoria, Gandhi realized that he loved teaching, not preaching!

It was on this occasion that Gandhi became a leader of men with the great ability to guide people with his passion for social justice.

Realizing that he had come to Pretoria to help a client, he set himself the task of solving the lawsuit and succeeded in bringing about an arbitration between the two parties. This success made him very pleased. “My joy was boundless. I have learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men’s hearts”.

WIth his wife in London in 1914

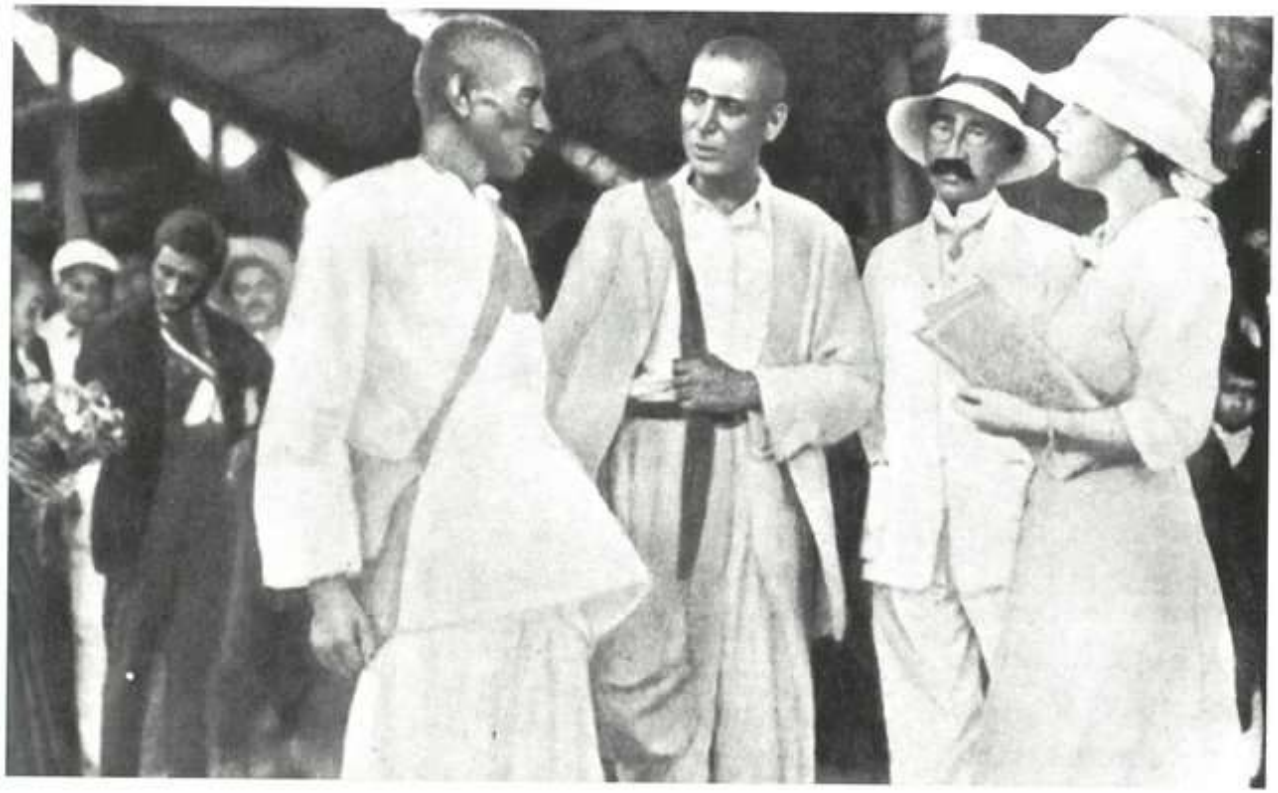
He had finished his work and now was prepared to return to India. But it was not to be. There was a bill to disenfranchise Indians, which left only 250 Indians able to vote against 10,000 Europeans. The bill was to ensure that no Indian could win any election. Gandhi could not leave. He had become a lawyer leader for the Indian community and they would not let him go back.

The decision was made by the people and a regular fee was also arranged for him as he had to earn his living. As a lawyer, he applied to the Law Society for membership and in spite of opposition from the whites, he was enrolled. But he was not allowed to wear his turban in court. He did not object, for his mind was on bigger things.

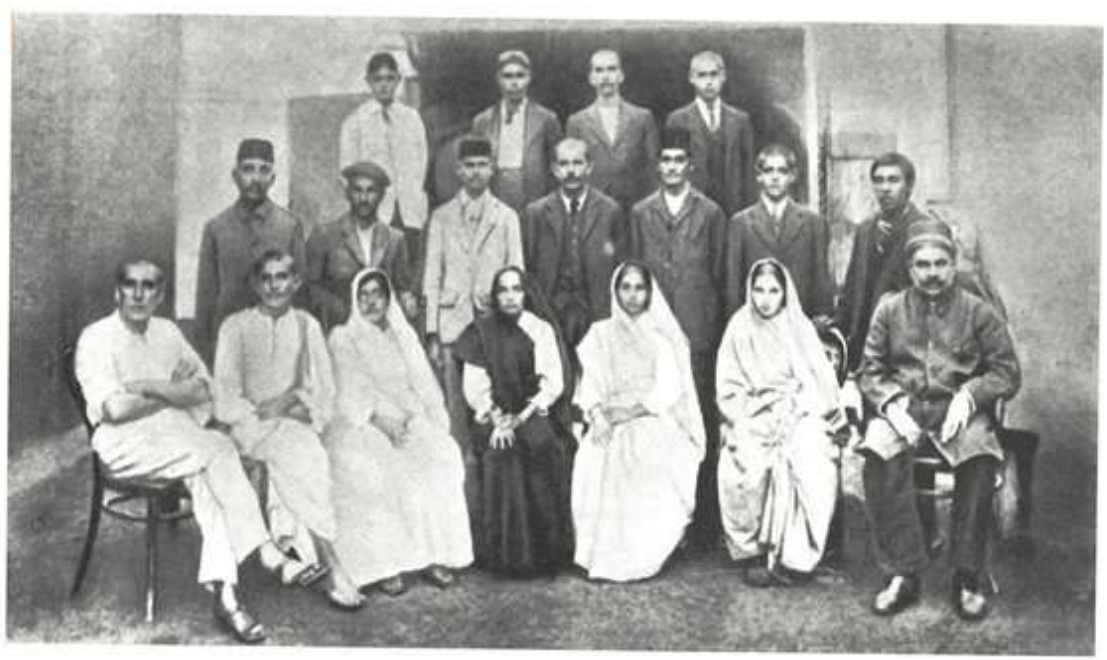
He formed the “Natal Indian Congress”, bringing together all communities. Two of the many rules made were interesting. All were to be addressed as “Mr”and smoking was prohibited.

In the beginning, the membership was mostly for the well to do Indians. Later a Tamilian changed that. One day, a man in torn clothes, broken teeth and bleeding mouth came into Gandhi’s office weeping, having been badly thrashed by his white master. Gandhi took the man’s master to court and saw justice done. The indentured labourers had found a new friend to defend them.

Gandhiji often repeated, “It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings”.



Mahatma Gandhi (left) with H. Kallenbach, G. Isaac and Mrs. Pollak at Maritzurg station on December 22, 1913, after his release from prison.



The pioneer party during the last phase of the South African struggle. Mahatma Gandhi is sitting second from the left.

Gandhiji’s campaign in South Africa was of great value and he decided to stay on. But his family was still in India, so taking six months’ leave, he left for his own country in June 1896. On boarding the ship he wrote of his struggle in South Africa and the article became so popular that more than 20,000 pamphlets were printed. Because of the green cover, it became known as “Gandhiji’s Green Pamphlet”.

At home in Rajkot there was a fear of plague. He visited many homes examining the dirty latrines, much to the irritation of the occupants and found that the latrines of the “untouchables” were the cleanest!

While in India, he met many outstanding people. There was Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, called the uncrowned king of Bombay (Mumbai), and the celebrated fierce patriot Lokamanya Tilak and Gopalkrishna Gokhale impressed him the most for his struggle against casteism and untouchability, and his emphasis on education. Before he finished his journey to cities in India, there was a frantic call for him to return to South Africa. His friend Dada Abdulla arranged a passage on the ship “Courtland” and Gandhi and his family sailed from Bombay.

The last photograph of Mahatma Gandhi in Durban, with his wife and several friends.

The whites in South Africa had been enraged by Gandhi’s green pamphlet and spread wild rumours about him. When they heard of his returning, they threatened to throw all the passengers into the sea! But Abdullah and his friends ensured that everyone disembarked except Gandhi. The Attorney General had ordered that he should disembark later. But the legal advisor of Dada Abdulla thought otherwise and provided a carriage for Mrs. Gandhi and the children.

But when Gandhi alighted, he was recognised and the white mob threw stones, rotten eggs and kicked him fiercely till he fainted with the dreadful battering. Fortunately, an Englishwoman rushed to his rescue and had him taken to a friend's house safely. But even there the wild mob yelled and shouted and Gandhi, dressed as a constable, escaped with the help of two detectives.

There was wide publicity in England about this unwarranted attack on an innocent person, and the British Secretary of State, Joseph Chamberlain, sent a cable to Natal that those responsible should be punished. When Gandhi heard of this order, he refused to prosecute anyone saying that they were "misted" and would repent for their behaviour.

The "coolie barrister" had come into his own. His non-violent struggle had begun in earnest. His proposed organization, the Natal Indian Congress also began a weekly magazine called "Indian Opinion".

His hands were full with the weekly magazine. Yet, when he heard of a plague outbreak, he rushed to help the patients, nursing the victims and giving personal attention to the afflicted.
He handed over the business of the weekly paper to an Englsihman, Albert West, who became a lifelong friend. Slowly but surely Gandhi was earning the admiration of the white population for his courage in facing all adversity.

It was another English friend, Henry Polak who gave Gandhi a book by the writer Ruskin called Unto This Last, in which he found many of his own thoughts and convictions. Years later he translated the book into Gujarati calling it Sarvodaya. With the inspiration from the book, he bought an old farm, shifting the office of the newspaper there. Slowly it became a colony and was called the "Phoenix settlement" after the station which was about three miles away. Gandhi was not only a lawyer, a Marmachari for human rights, a resistor of evil in every form, but also an experimenter with food. Polak wrote, "Talk, and laughter accompanied the grinding. The grinding was of wheat for making bread in which everyone had to participate. So laughter came easily to the Phoenix household".

Sri Dayanand Saraswati with his several friends

Then suddenly came a decision that no salt was to be used, and later no sugar. A dish of raw onion chopped into pieces was served for dinner to purify the blood! Gandhi’s experiments in dietetics went on all his life. Later, clay healing also became a contribution to a healthy life.

In February 1906, the Zulus who had been cruelly treated for centuries, revolted against the Boers. The Whites again were at their brutal game of harassing, insulting and beating up the Blacks “with inhuman savagery”. Violence was rampant but a major crisis was averted when the Indians led by Gandhi came to the rescue, looking after and protecting the Zulus who were deeply grateful.

It was a heartrending and difficult experience, that of tending to the wounded Zulus. Volunteers walked, often fifty miles a day with stretchers and medicines, aghast at the cruelty of men to their own humankind. This experience made Gandhi decide that his life would be dedicated to the He would follow his ‘inner light’ and never deviate from truth and honesty.

White rulers, infuriated by Gandhi’s help to the Zulus, now decided that the “brown fellows” must be taught a lesson. Any Indian, they ordered, entering the Transvaal must register and give his or her name and age and thumb impression on a card. Indians named it the Black Ordinance, and were outraged at this new degradation.

Gandhi was quick to respond. He held a huge mass meeting of the Indian Community. “There is only one course open to me, namely, to die, but not to submit to the law, even if everyone else were to hold back, leaving me alone” he told his compatriots.

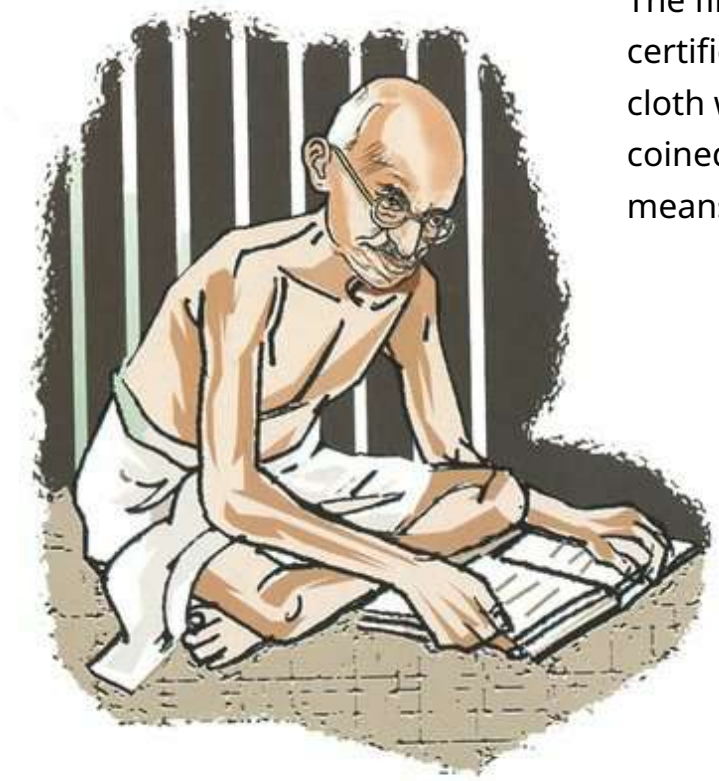
As he always did in his life, he first tried to come to terms with the authorities. But they were adamant and refused. Gandhi, who still believed in English justice, sailed to England. The government of England, which he

Had thought was liberal, refused to listen. The Transvaal was soon to be self governing. The British wished to please them rather than the Indian populace.

The Transvaal government's first act was to pass a Black Bill. Indians, now realizing the hypocrisy of the British government, decided not to register and the wrath of the government resulted in arrests and deportation. Finally, General Smuts had Gandhi arrested and brought to trial in the same court where he had been a barrister. Sentenced to three months' imprisonment in Johannesburg jali, he called the movement "passive resistance" - a unique struggle of people who did not resist punishment. Later, he renamed it "Civil resistance" and then Satyagraha, the doctrine of "holding fast to the truth".

In Sanskrit, satya means truth and agraha, desire or effort. Gandhi described it as a vindication of truth, never by inflicting suffering on the opponent, but by self-sacrifice. It is patience, faith and above all truth to oneself. So, a Satyagrahi suffers even death to preserve this truth, which is a “weapon” of the strong, who do not allow violence in any form.

In 1914 “force had to bow down before heroic gentleness”. The act was abolished and the non-resistance movement won. Satyagraha had triumphed and would triumph again and again through the century.



The first civil disobedience movement where the Indians threw their certificates into the fire was repeated many years later in India when foreign cloth was burnt in huge bonfires all over the country. Another word that was coined, for voluntarily for absenting oneself from work was hartal, which means strike, action or a mobilization of mass protest.

Though Gandhi was always in conflict with the imperialistic British, he had close friends amongst them. When he was beaten up by Pathans who refused to register even after Smuts had climbed down on the subject of registration, and had injured Gandhi badly, it was his friend, the Baptist minister Joseph Duke who took him home and nursed him. When Joseph Duke had read about “passive resistance”, he wanted to meet Gandhi. He expected a tall bold masterly man and was surprised to see “the small slim figure with the smile that lit the face and the direct fearless glance which simply took one’s heart by storm”.

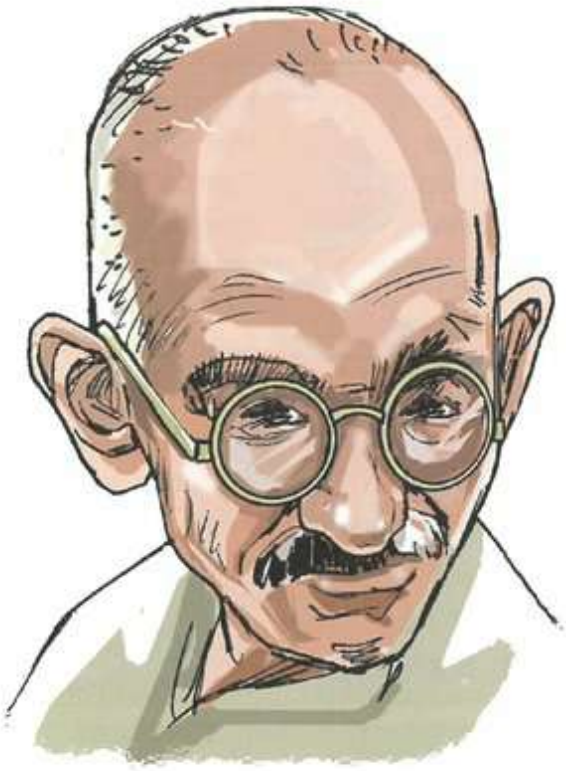
It is almost impossible for us today to even think of the terrible hardships this man of truth and nonviolence suffered.

The British authorities under Smuts abused and beat up the volunteers in jail. Often, other prisoners who were Zulus of the criminal type also hit and abused them. When Gandhi was taken into court, this great man was dressed as a convict and handcuffed. Yet, he never protested.

Even though he heard his wife was seriously ill, he did not ask for pardon as he had dedicated himself to the great struggle.

He wrote her a tender letter of his deep love saying “I have offered my all to the Satyagraha. My struggle is not merely political. It is religious and therefore quite pure”. In spite of all these terrible experiences, he still trusted British fair play!

When finally he was released, he along with some others went to England, on a delegation hoping to negotiate for fair play and justice. Sadly British government did not respond and lost a good friend. Gandhi, however did not lack friends in England. He found the women most courageous in fighting for equality. He felt that he had really learnt the art of passive resistance from women. His wife was one of his first “gurus” who would not allow her husband to compel her to do anything that she was not willing to accept as correct. As he said, “ she just passively resists me and I am helpless!”



He enjoyed the huge number of visitors and shared with them English tea and buttered toast. Dressed in an English suit, he was fashionable with his silk hat, morning coat and smart shoes. In South Africa, he dressed more informally and later, as all Indians think of him, in the barest of necessities, a loincloth, a shawl, sandals and a stick.

In London, he found young Indian revolutionaries who believed in violence as the only solution to win freedom. A British official had been shot dead by a man called Madanlal Dhingra, who called himself a patriot and made a fervent, eloquent speech in court, praised even by Winston Churchill. But Gandhi condemned the act. “It is not merely wine or bhang that makes one drunk, a mad idea also can do so. He acted like a coward for the man had been an invited guest at an Indian social gathering and then was killed.

He was appalled at the misguided patriotism of young Indians and wrote, “No act of treachery can ever profit a nation. India can gain nothing from the rule of murderers, be they Black or White”.

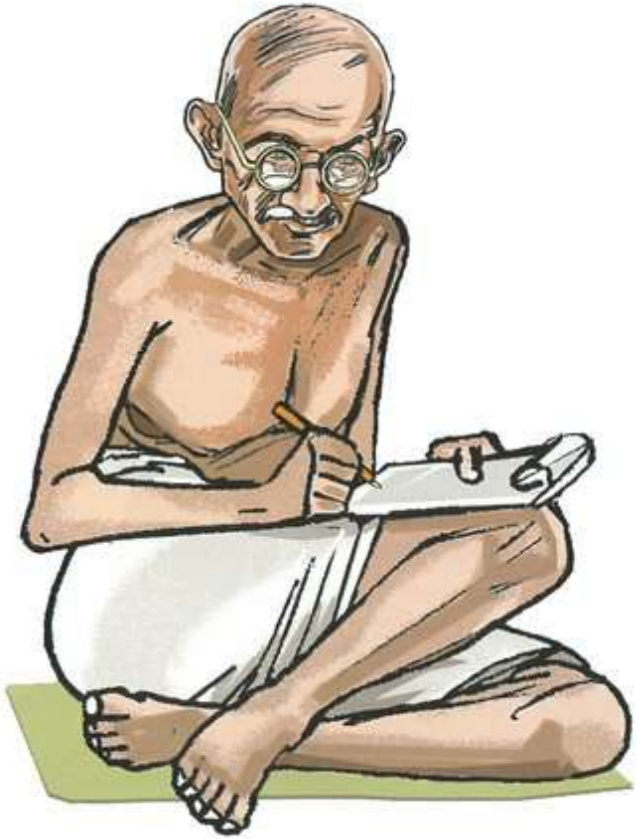
These acts of violence set him thinking of how to free his own country. “If a man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man’s tyranny will enslave him”.

With these bitter experiences, Gandhi realized that the condition of England was pitiable as he wrote in a pamphlet called Hindi Swaraj. It was a bitter indictment, a denunciation of modern life with its emphasis on railways, machinery and even the Parliament of England.

With Gokhale in South Africa

Meanwhile in India, Gokhale had taken up the cause of the Indians of South Africa and gave voice to his concerns, which caused national anger and resentment everywhere.

When in 1912, Gokhale visited South Africa it was Gandhi, who acted as his secretary and close companion, even folding the angavastram that Gokhale wore over his shoulder. While General Botha and General Smuts greeted Gokhale and assured him that all would be settled and the Black Act dispensed with, they soon went back on their word and began interfering with things like Indian marriages.

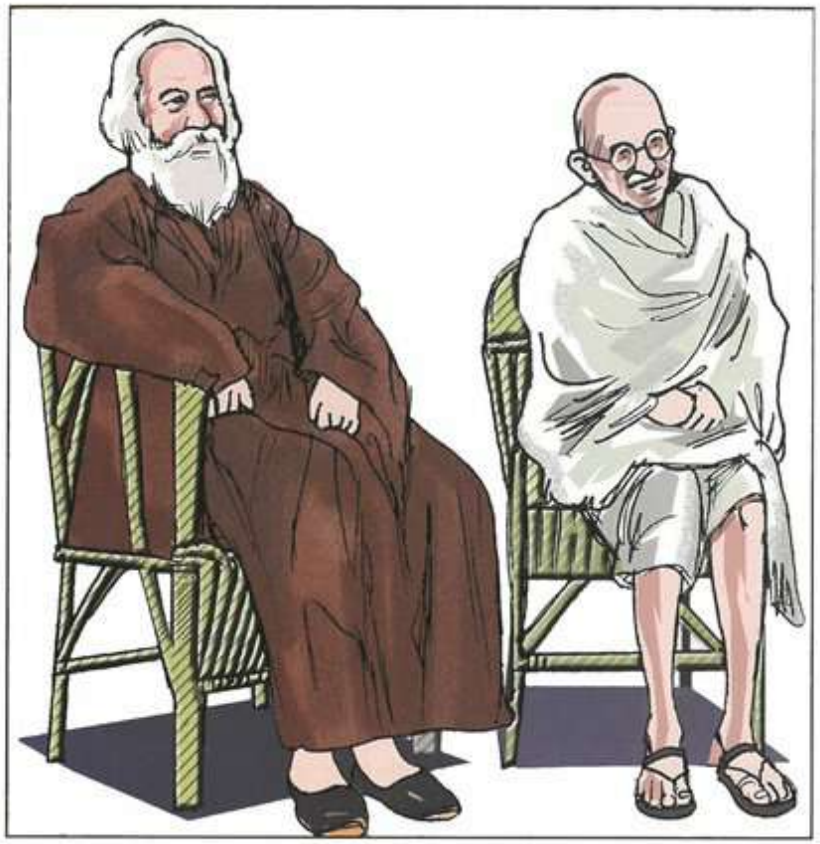


So again in 1913, Gandhi organized an Indian protest. Men and women joined willingly and the Indian miners went on a strike, for which they were brutally thrown out of their settlements. Gandhi created an army of people who went into the Transvaal and courted arrest many of them women with babies in their arms.

Gandhi, who was supported by his Western colleagues including his secretary Miss Sahlesin, was sentenced to jail for nine months. Miners were beaten up and made to go back to the mines in the most terrible circumstances. Cruelty was the order of the day, but the brave people endured the brutal and inhuman acts.

A deep wave of horror swept India, when the news came out. Even the British Viceroy in India was horrified and condemned South African barbarism.It was the imperial government which finally acted and made General Smuts release the prisoners. In the meanwhile, Gokhale had sent two Englishmen who were men of great honour to try and resolve the crisis. They were Charles Freer Andrews and W.W. Pearson, both men of integrity and dedication. An all White commission was formed by General Smuts but Gandhi did not trust them and decided to start the resistance again.

At the moment, fate intervened. The White workers of the South African railway went on strike. General Smuts declared martial law. Gandhi, the man of peace decided to stop the civil resistance, for this was Gandhi’s way. He would never attack a weak adversary. He saw that General Smuts was in difficulty and went to his help. This gesture of goodwill astonished and touched everyone. General Smuts asked for a meeting. The result was the abolition of tax. Marriages according to Indian law were made valid and many of the grievances removed.



Gandhi had won by peaceful means, without violence and hatred. A battle had been fought without any killing or bloodshed. Gandhi recalled the Magna Carta of liberty in this land. It had taken eight years of struggle and much suffering. Passive resistance had triumphed against brutality and bloodshed!

It was after ten eventful years in South Africa that Gandhi returned home to India. There were not many in India who knew of his achievements in South Africa, but Gokhale who was his political guru, gave him a warm welcome and Rabindranath Tagore, a home in Santiniketan. Again, it was an Englishman, who had been responsible for the friendship between the poet and the Satyagrahi. It was the poet who first called Gandhi
“The Mahatma”.

Sadly, Gokhale died on February 19, 1915 when Gandhi left for Pune. He had promised his guru that he would travel extensively and study his country’s men and women.

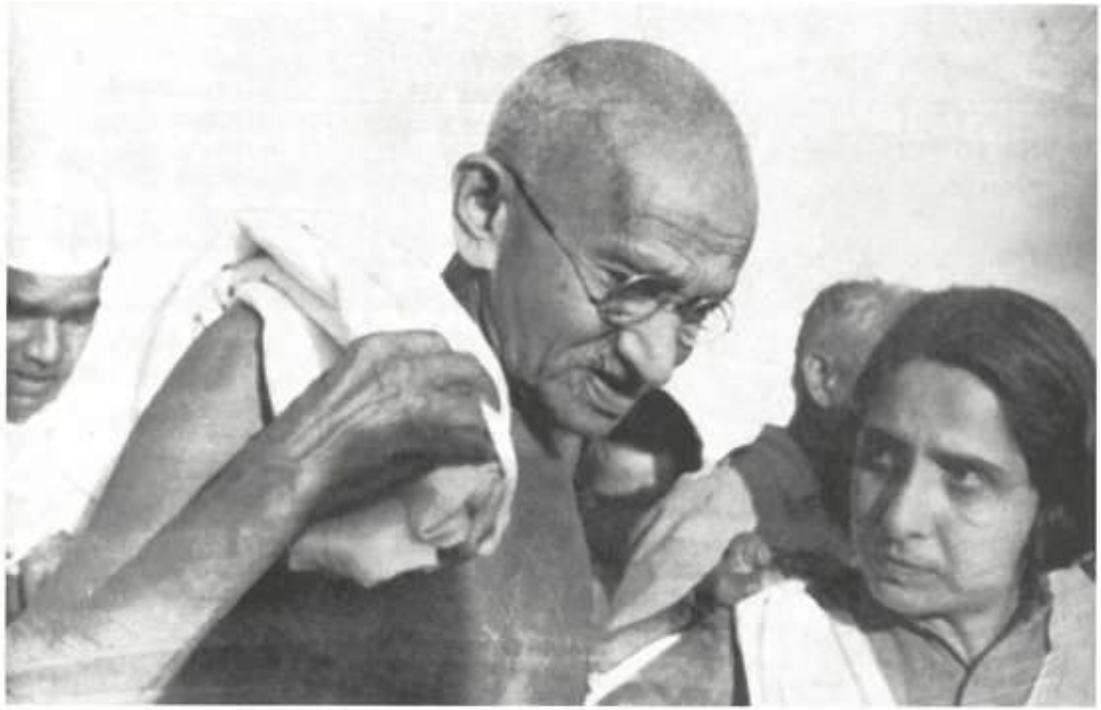
Observing the hypocrisy of many of the pilgrims in Haridwar, the waste of food, the dirt and greed he decided to take only five articles of food a day, never more than absolutely essential for the body's health.

For a year he travelled and then decided to settle down to form a permanent settlement as he had done in South Africa. He chose Ahmedabad and founded his ashram on the banks of the river Sabarmati. Those who joined the ashram took vows to adhere to truth, to be celibate, non-violent and non-possessive in every sphere of life.

Ahmedabad, the centre of the textile industry was a wealthy city. Many of the industrialists promised help and gave generously till they heard that an "untouchable family" had been admitted in the ashram. All donations stopped abruptly, except for one. Abalal Sarabhai of Calico Mills donated anonymously a sum large enough to save the ashram. Both men had a common passion for abolishing caste and other inequalities within Indian Society. The relationship between his family and Gandhi lasted more than a lifetime.

Gandhi solved all the disputes and settled quietly in the ashram. The storm however was about to break.

Far away in a place called Champaran in Bihar, poor peasants were being forced by European planters to grow indigo on their land. They were also forced to sell the entire crop at a fixed price, which proved to be a great burden on them.



Mahatma Gandhi with Smt. Mrudula Sarabhai

Gandhi, who visited Champaran was overwhelmed and disturbed by the plight of these people. When the people heard that a “Mahatma” had come to their district, they besieged him with their woes and the crowds became so huge that Gandhi was ordered to leave by the police superintendent. Naturally, Gandhi refused and was ordered to appear at the court, which he did, followed by thousands of supporters. The magistrate postponed the case, which was later withdrawn.

Here at Champaran was Gandhi’s first experiment of active Satyagraha or passive resistance. He spent time educating and organizing the villagers, sending their children to school, teaching them to imbibe clean, hygienic habits and at the same time fighting for their cause.

A commission was appointed to enquire into the cause of the struggle and a settlement was reached. Gandhi’s honesty and integrity always had an impact. Sir George Rainy, a member of the committee, remarked, “Mr. Gandhi reminds me of the Apostle Paul”.

Returning to Ahmedabad, he found himself in the midst of a labour dispute. The workers in the textile mills, about five hundred of them from all communities, requested a Dearness Allowance as they had worked throughout a plague epidemic in the city. Anasuya Sarabhai, who worked amongst them and knew of their grievances signed the petition. She had written to Gandhi for his blessing before taking this step against her own brother Ambalal Sarabhai, who was a leading figure of the mill owners.

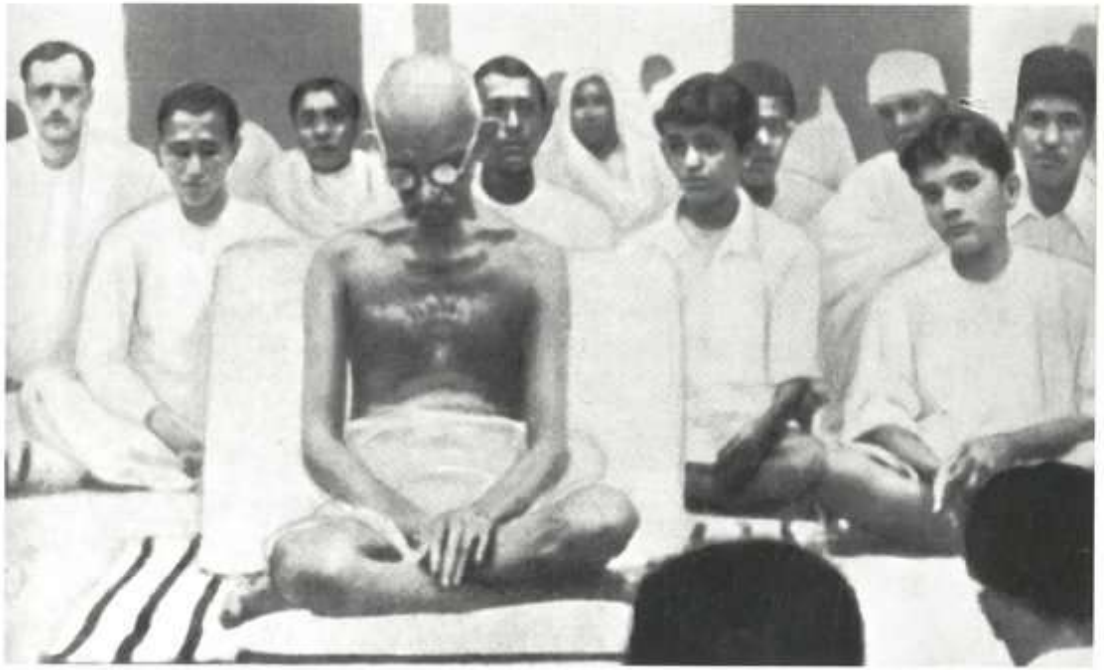
Every evening, under the Babul tree which was the old Kalupur gate, Gandhi with Anasuya Sarabhai at his side, would talk to the workers, trying to find a solution that satisfied both sides.

Studying the entire issue carefully, Gandhi felt that the workers were justified and advised them to strike work. This proposal was agreed to, but there was also the fear of being dismissed, of having no work, of starving. Gandhi, realizing their fears, decided to fast himself. Both workers and mill owners were aghast. They could not allow Gandhi to fast. After three days the mill owners and workers agreed to an arbitration, much to everyone’s relief.

Gandhi’s statement that action alone is just which does not harm either party in a dispute was fully justified. Some of the workers even composed poetry and praised the event.

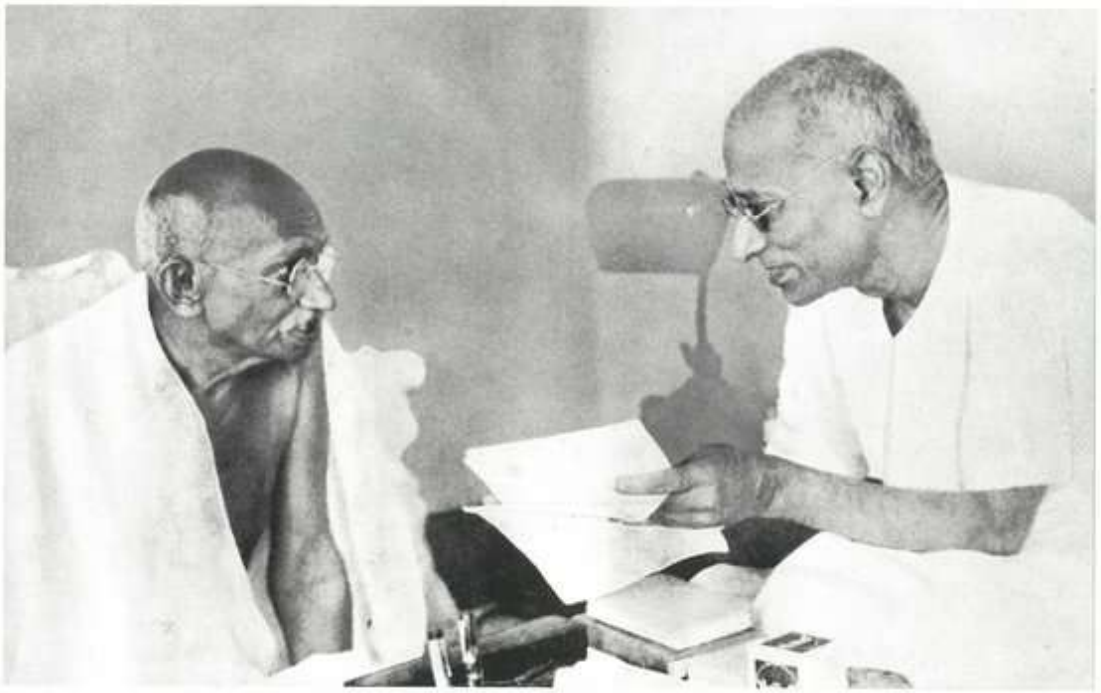
Gandhi’s faith in the British still prevailed in spite of all his campaigns. In 1918 the war against Germany began and the British government began a campaign to enlist Indians as soldiers. At a conference on the war in Delhi, Gandhi was invited by the Viceroy of India. Gandhi, who had been through the experiences of Africa, still had faith in the British sense of justice and called to his countrymen to enlist in the army. As he wrote to his friend Polak, “My recruiting campaign is a religious activity undertaken for the sacred doctrine of ahimsa (non-violence). I have made the discovery that India has lost the power to fight - not the inclination. She must regain the power and then she will deliver to a growing world the doctrine of ahimsa”.

Britain won the war with the help of Indian soldiers. But Gandhi’s faith in British justice was soon destroyed. The government issued the Rowlatt Act which authorized the government to imprison any person suspected of terrorism without trial. It was a Draconian act, and enraged the people of India. Gandhi went to Delhi to listen to the debate on the Bill where Indian speakers deplored the evil act and requested the governor to withdraw it. Gandhi looked at the Viceroy who seemed to be listening, but was perhaps sound asleep! The Rowlatt Bill served a purpose that was perhaps the intervention of fate, to create the way for Gandhi’s struggle for freedom. The Act actually encouraged powers to arrest citizens and imprison them without trial and to curtail all attempts of freedom. From that moment on till the end of his life, he fought for complete freedom from British imperialism.



At Sabarmati, inaugurating the campaign of individual civil disobedience in July 1933.

It was to be an all India struggle and all of India had to participate in the movement of Satyagraha, all in a completely non-violent way. He decided that it was time to go to South India to enlist the support of the citizens there. There, he met a remarkable personality - C. Rajagopalachari - who became a great worker and colleague. It was at Rajaji's home that Gandhi thought of declaring a national day where no one would cooperate with the government and spend the time in fasting and prayer observing hartal.



Mahatma Gandhi with C. Rajagopalachari, ‘Rajaji’, one of his closest fellow-workers

The entire country responded to Gandhi’s call and perhaps for the first time, the British government realized the power of this great spiritual non-violent leader. The government responded by shooting innocent people who took in a procession.

Gandhi was deeply upset at this violence and left for Delhi but was arrested on the way, which caused more unrest in the country, even acts of violence. Gandhi called off the movement immediately but the British took terrible vengeance.

On April 13, 1918 the commander of the British troops massacred a holiday crowd of unarmed civilians, men, women and children who were picnicking in a garden called Jallianwala Bagh on the Hindu New Year's day. There was no way out as the soldiers were shot in cold blood and more than three thousand people were wounded. After this dastardly act, martial law was declared in the Punjab and people were made to crawl on the roads. This event marked the end of the British Empire and British honour became dust in the eyes of the world. Civil action was demonstrated by closing all shops and declaring a complete hartal. Gandhi commenced the day by going to Chowpatty, Bombay by the seashore. Soon, more and more people joined him and as the then newspaper reported "there must have been approximately one and a half lakhs - all communities, Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and even Englishmen".

Gandhi’s call worked a miracle. His voice was heard all over India and he was now hailed as the Mahatma. The non-violent movement had gripped the entire country. The British retaliated by arresting men and women, yet more and more volunteered.

Gandhi continually said,”I believe in peace, but not at any price”.

The great poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “It is fortunate that this movement is headed by a man like Gandhi, whose saintly life has made him adored all over India”.

But the non-violent struggle of the people took a sad turn when in February 1922 a mob angry at the police, attacked them in Chauri Chaura (Uttar Pradesh) and in their frenzy, killed them, setting fire to the police station. Gandhi reacted by calling off the campaign. “The only virtue I claim”, he said “is truth and non-violence”.

The government of course took full advantage of the incident and Gandhi was arrested late at night to avoid the public.

As a tireless worker for peace, addressing a meeting at a train halt.

Gandhi, at his trial, blaming no one said he had no ill will against any administrator but only against a government, which in its totality has done more harm inIndia than any previous system.

He “submitted cheerfully” to the “highest penalty” and received a sentence of six years imprisonment. Yet, he held no grudge against the British. “While I have a deep quarrel with the government, I love Englishmen and have many friends among them”, he told a friend.

When he came out of imprisonment, he decided to devote himself to building up the foundation of his philosophy. This meant many things, like removing untouchability, securing equal rights for women and providing work for everyone through the spinning of cloth, not by machines but by hand. He did not want to participate in a national movement, but instead to test his own ideas. It was at this time that he wrote The Story of My Experiments With Truth in Gujarati which was later translated in English.

It was the year 1929. The people were fed up with broken British promises. A Simon Commission had been appointed to look into reforms but without a single Indian member!

Gandhi and the Congress no longer wanted any compromise and now passed a resolution for complete independence or Purna Swaraj. The pledge was taken by millions of people on January 26, 1930. Twenty years later, on the same day India adopted its Constitution and since then the day has been observed all over India as Republic Day. From the ashram in Ahmedabad on March 12th 1930, Gandhi led the now historic Dandi March to the sea to break the salt law, which denied even salt to the poorest citizen. Typical of this great man’s truth, he informed the Viceroy of the march. The Viceroy perhaps thought it not worth noticing! How wrong he was. Thousands joined Gandhi as he walked through the villages with his rapid stride. They were shot at, beaten and harassed by the police but no one gave in. Thousands invited arrest and filled the jails. That was perhaps the moment when Britain lost India.

At Ahmedabad, leading the Great Salt March (Dandi March) on 12th March 1930

But the government in London persisted and called a Round Table Conference in November 1930 to discuss a future constitution for India. No one from the Indian National Congress was invited.

Realizing their failure, the Viceroy had to invite Gandhi for talks to the house. The talk was rather prolonged and Gandhi, who was very strict about his diet, sent for his lunch. The food consisted mainly of dates and milk and was packed in Gandhi's jail vessel! The Viceroy watched as Gandhi ate his humble fare and even looked into the pot!

First Session of the Round Table Conference at St. James Palace, 14th Sept, 1931

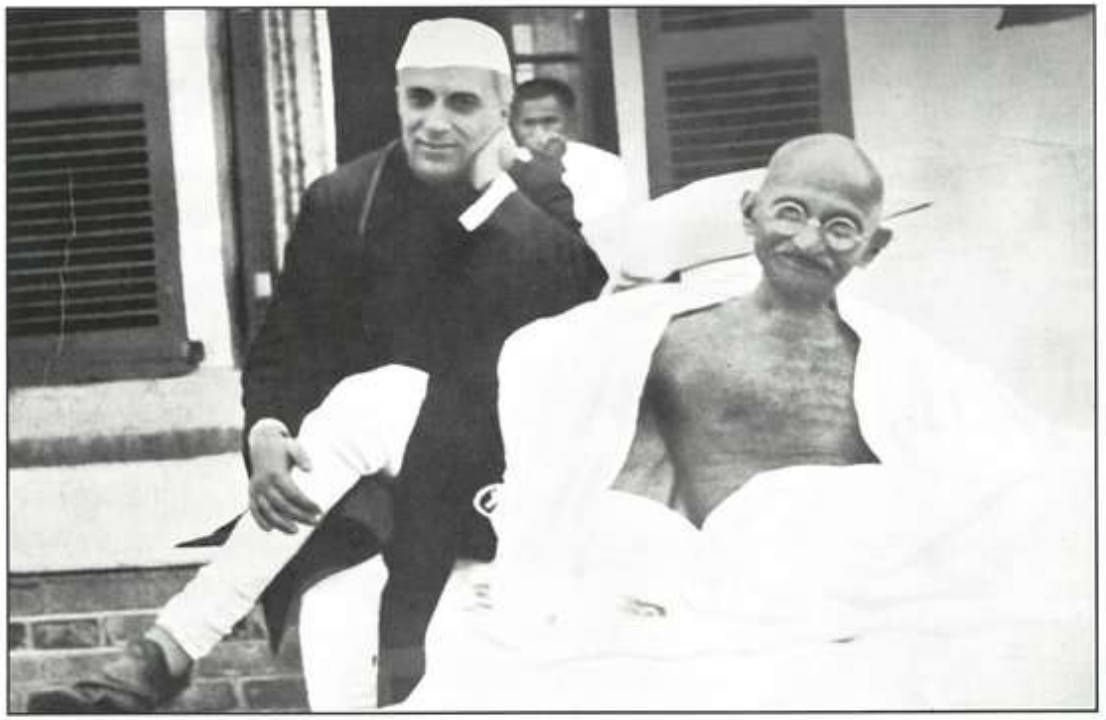
In 1931, gandhi sailed for London for the Second Round Table Conference. While in London, he stayed in the poorest quarter and the working people soon took him into their heart. Wherever he went, crowds followed him, loving this great human being. But with the government of Britain, it was a different story. He achieved nothing but the admiration and love of the poor workers. On his return, he met Romain Rolland, the writer, his admirer and author of his biography, who compared him to St. Francis of Assisi. “This little man”, he wrote “is tireless and fatigue is a word which does not exist in his vocabulary”. Crowds came to see him, photographers and even milkmen who wanted to supply the “King of India” with milk!

He had to face more repression, shootings and arrests when he came home. Jawaharlal Nehru, coming to receive him in Bombay, was arrested. After a week Gandhi too was imprisoned without trial in the Yerwada jail in Pune.

Gandhi told us “I do not remember to have seen a handloom or a spinning wheel when in 1908 I described it in Hind Swaraj as the panacea for the pauperism of India”. He used it to bring equality between men and women and also to the so-called untouchables. Indian nationalists burnt their foreign cloths and started wearing Khadi.

The British textile-export to India dropped nearly by 80%. According to a writer, “Any single district that can be fully organized for Khadar is ready for civil disobedience. The charka was a wonderful weapon for the freedom of India from Britain”.

Gandhi’s influence on every great leader was astonishing. He insisted on speaking in the national language and not in English at public meetings. Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal Nehru changed completely from their British style of living to Indianness and the whole of India followed.



Photographed for the last time with Prime Minister of Indian Union, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in December 1947

On January 4, 1932, the British government again arrested Gandhi and several Indian Nationalist leaders. Miraben, also arrested, was put into a cell with criminals. Gandhi wrote “The word criminal should be taboo in our dictionary” and he quoted from the Bible, “Those of you that are without sin cast the first stone”.

Even in jail he was actively aware of the political situation and when the communal award was announced he was shocked. The award announced a separate electorate for untouchables, which of course meant that untouchables remain so all their lives. He declared that he would go on a fast unto death for his brothers whom he named Harijans.

His “friend” had already sent a telegram “our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love”. The entire nation was now aroused. The evil practice of untouchability was tackled for the first time and many temples were thrown open to Harijans. “If India is to live, untouchability must die”, Gandhi said “I would rather be torn to pieces than disown my brothers of the suppressed classes”.

He was released from imprisonment in May 1933 and broke his fast. His friend Rabindranath Tagore was the first to greet him with a song from his poem “Gitanjali”.

Probably the only photograph of Mahatma Gandhi with Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, when they met at Darjeeling in June 1925.

Gandhi never returned to the Sabarmati ashram for he had declared that he would not return till India was free. From Ahmedabad he had moved to Wardha in Maharashtra and devoted his time to Harijan's problems. Working to develop India's village economy, he wanted every village to be self-reliant economically, a dream sadly still not realized. The people of India were more than ready for freedom. Non-violence did not seem like the answer for many young people. The Cripps mission failure made everyone realize that the British were not in any mood to laeve.

In 1939, war broke out again. Gandhi by now had lost all the affection and respect for the British government and also now believed that all war was wholly wrong. His creed was non-violence though he said "Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I advise violence".

In spite of Britain fighting with their Backs to the wall, the fall of France and the holocaust in Germany with the terrible slaughter of the Jewish people, Gandhi refused to take advantage of the situation. It was Winston Churchill who sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a mission to "coax India" to help in the war effort.

But the whole mission failed. Indians had learnt the hard way not to trust the British government, nor any of their promises. Gandhi himself was disillusioned and asked Cripps to take the next plane to England.

In the East, the Japanese threat was a real one. The news that an Indian leader, Subhash Chandra Bose, was leading an army of independence and that a women's army led by Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan was fighting along with their brothers, was exhilarating for the Indians.

It was on August 7,1942 that Gandhi announced his "Quit India" programme, which inspired people everywhere.
The British replied in their usual way. In the early morning of August, Gandhi and other leaders of the congress were secretly arrested and whisked away to various places under police guard.

The whole of India was aghast. Everywhere people protested and desperately tried to hamper the administration in every way possible. The British government took stern measures and India became a land of armed occupation.

Mahatma Gandhi with Sardar Vallahbhai Patel with other members of Congress

Gandhi was locked up in the Aga Khan Palace with other leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Miraben and Kasturbai.

There was no alternative but another fast, a fast for 21 days which the Viceroy called “a form of political blackmail”.

Many of the members of the government resigned in protest but it made no difference.

While in the Palace jail, two great tragedies occurred. His devoted friend and secretary Mahadev Desai, whom he loved dearly, died after having been with him for twenty-five years.

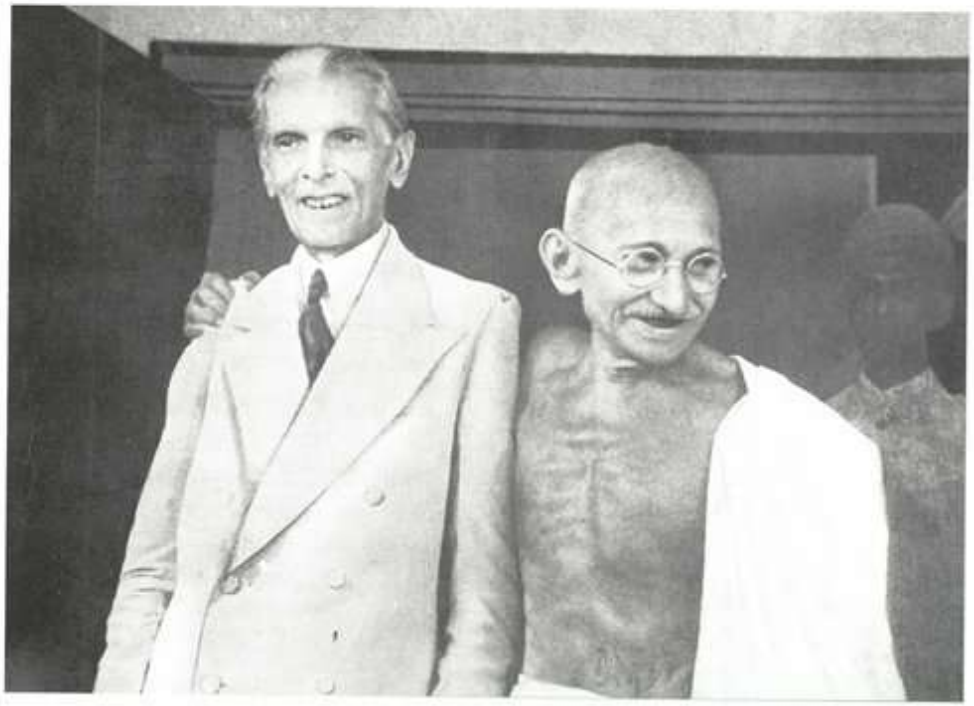
After leaving the jail, worse was still to come. In December, his wife Kasturba Gandhi fell ill and passed away. She and Gandhi had been married for sixty-two years.

Gandhi himself grew weaker and weaker and the public of India demanded his release. At last on May 6, Gandhi, now weak with his deep sorrow, his body emaciated by the fast, was released.

Kasturba Gandhi

Leaving jail with Mahadev Desai

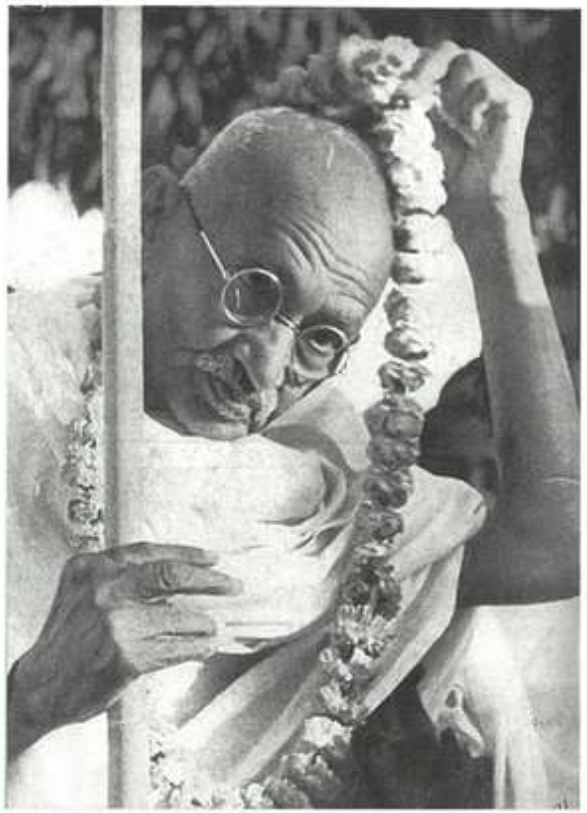
Free from prison, he faced the problem of the division of Hindus and Muslim but in vain. He who had striven all his life for this unity, now failed to create an atmosphere of goodwill between the two communities.



Mahatma Gandhi with Mohammed Ali Jinnah

It was altogether a bleak situation. Most of the Congress leaders were in jail. Mohammed Ali Jinnah wanted to have a separate country, the British were fighting for their lives, yet keeping a stranglehold on India. India had been bled dry for the war effort and a terrible famine had ravaged Bengal.

Gandhi, in spite of his poor health, was everywhere encouraging and inspiring people. “Your future is in your hands”, he told them.



On the eve of his life, barefoot and armed only with love for mankind and faith in God and truth, he went in November 1946 to Novakhali to restore peace, mutual harmony and respect between the communities there

The British, exhausted perhaps after the war, realized that ruling India was no longer something to be proud about. The Prime Minister declared an early realization of self-government for India.

A cabinet mission was sent to India and after much discussion the Viceroy requested Jawaharlal Nehru to form a government. This was on August 12, 1946. Jinnah who wanted a separate state, declared August 16 as “Direct Action Day”

Hindus and Muslims slaughtered each other, all hell was let loose. Gandhi called upon the Hindus to make peace. He immediately went to Bengal to speak of tolerance. But the poison had already spread to Bihar.

Gandhi went to the villages and saw devastation everywhere.

He was 77 years old, frail of health, eating practically nothing. Yet, he walked everywhere, pleading in the name of god of Ishwara and of Allah for peace, goodwill, brotherhood.

But the people did not listen. The Muslims had killed Hindus, raped their women and slaughtered children. The Hindus had retaliated in Bihar in the same savage manner. Gandhi spoke out, “To me the sins of the Muslims and the Bihar Hindus are of the same magnitude and are equally condemnable”.

The more Gandhi tried to bring peace and goodwill, the more he was resented. Yet, women came with their children to pay homage from distant villages.

At last the British government decided to appoint a new Viceroy who could act in the best interests of the Indian people and Lord Mountbatten came to Delhi.

His first gesture of goodwill was to invite Gandhi to Delhi. Gandhi was against partition of the country but his voice went unheard. “Today I find myself all alone”,he said. “Let it not be said that Gandhi as party to India’s vivisection”.

He did not go to Delhi to participate in the Independence ceremony but was approached for a message. “There is no message at all”,replied the great Mahatma. “If it is bad, let it be so”.

Gandhi now found himself maligned on all sides. His brave attempts to bring peace and goodwill enraged both the Hindus and Muslims. On his 78th birthday, greetings came from all over the world, but he asked whether it would not be better to offer condolences. “Pray that the present horror be ended or that God should take me away”,he said. “I do not wish another birthday to overtake me in an India, still in flames”.

In January 12, he told the gathering at his prayer meeting that he would go on a fast the following day. “It will end”, he said, “when I am convinced that the various communities resume their friendly relations of their own free will”.

The lonely pilgrim

Mahatma Gandhi with Lord & Lady Mountbatten

“As always, the fast had a tremendous effect which demonstrates a power which may prove greater than the atom bomb and which the West should watch with envy and hope”, wrote a British journalist.

When in Delhi, Gandhi held prayer meetings every evening, to recite prayers from every religion. At the end of the recitals, he would speak on topical issues to the congregation. He refused any police protection, though many feared for his life.

Many years ago,in Johannesburg, South Africa, he had been threatened by an angry man. At that time he said, “to die by the hand of a brother, rather than by disease or in any other way, cannot be for me a matter of sorrow”.

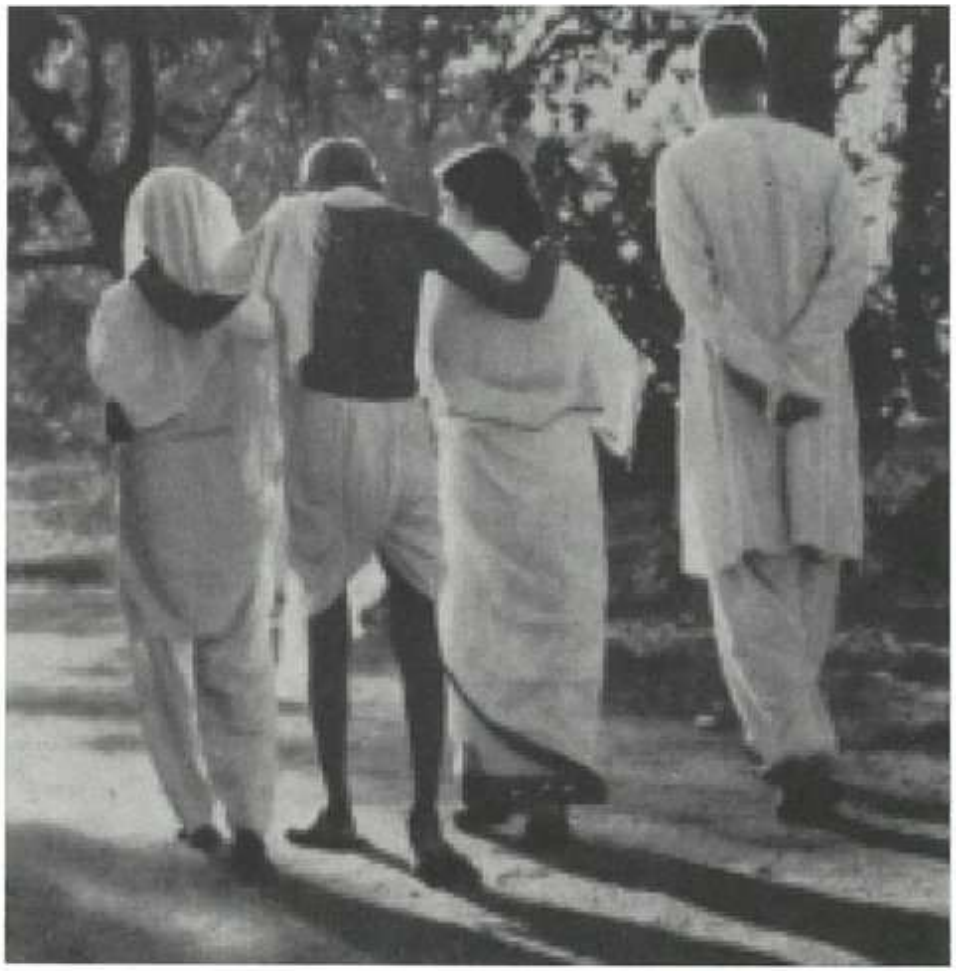
On January 20, a bomb exploded in the prayer meeting. Gandhi did not bother to take notice and continued his talk. Lady Mountbatten who was present congratulated him on his brave demeanour.

On the way to attend his last prayer meeting on January 30, 1948 (Front View)

January 30 dawned as usual with prayers at 3.30.

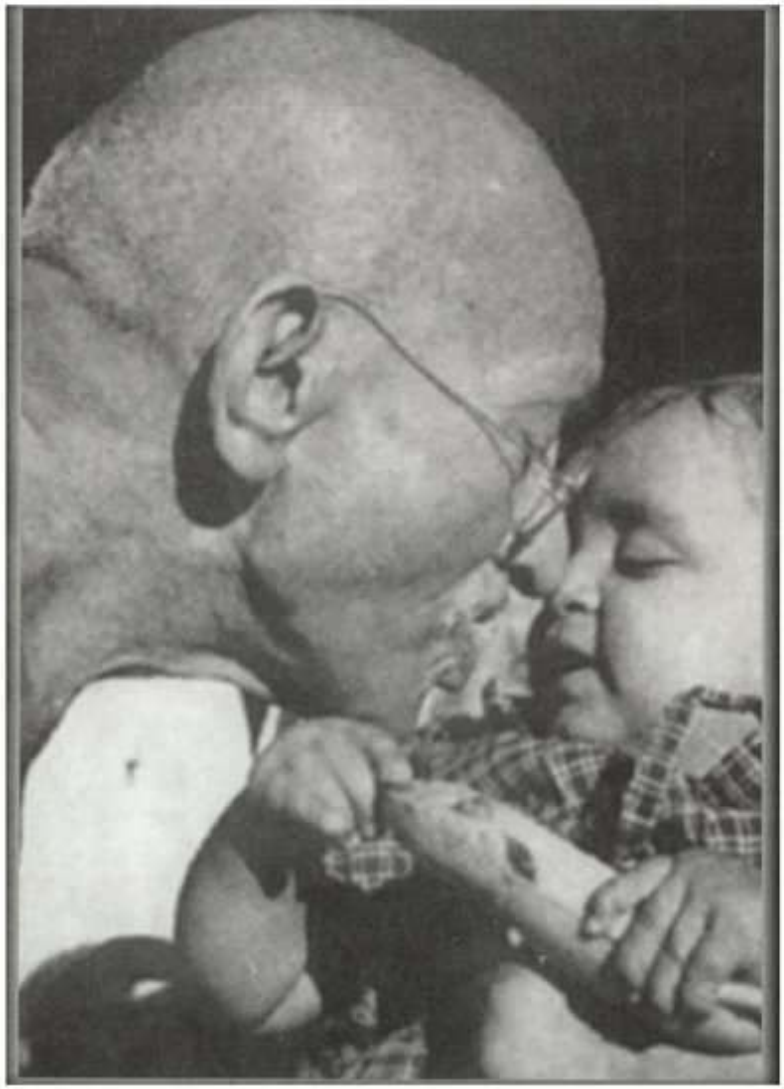
He finished his work which was the draft on how the Congress should function in the future.

Visitors kept coming and were received as usual. The last one was Sardar Patel, the “Iron Man of India”. It was getting late for the prayers, so Gandhi his hands on the shoulders of his grand nieces hurried to the lawn, greeting people on the way. A young man pushed everyone aside. Kneeling before Gandhi, the Mahatma, he fired three shots at his chest.
The Mahatma fell to the ground.



On the way to attend his last prayer meeting on January 30, 1948 (Back View)

The entire world was shaken by the death of this great son of India, Mahatma Gandhi. Albert Einstein , the scientist, wrote, speaking for all humanity, “Generations to come may scarce believe that such a one as this in flesh and blood walked upon this Earth”. Today each one of us should dedicate ourselves to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Let us strive to establish peace on Earth so that we may live in a nonviolent world.



Author Bio:

Mrinalini Sarabhai, the internationally recognised dancer and choreographer, trained in Bharatanatyam, had a reputation for innovation that was unmatched. After having trained in Java, Indonesia and the United States where she studied acting at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, she founded Darpana, an academy of dance, drama and music, in Ahmedabad in 1948. She has also authored a variety of novels, scholarly and children's books. She was one of the trustees of the Sarvodaya International Trust, an organisation dedicated to promoting the Gandhian ideals of Truth, Non Violence, Peace, Universal Brotherhood and Humanitarian Service. Sarabhai was also closely associated with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for over four decades and has published Sacred Dance of India, and The Mahatma and the Poetess through them. She passed away in 2016 at the age of 98.

'First published by Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan in 2007'.

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

(English)

Sarabhai's book traces the different life phases of the Father of the Nation. Sprinkled with a range of anecdotes, this book is intended to make every child acquainted with the Mahatma's life and works.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.

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